

# CONNECTIONS, CONTRARIETIES, AND CONVOLUTIONS: CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC REFORM IN ALBERTA AND ONTARIO, 1930-1955

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To apply newer philosophical approaches in education, Alberta and Ontario experimented with dramatic curriculum and pedagogic reform during the progressive era, c. 1930 to 1955. However, by the mid-1950s both provinces returned to more traditional disciplinary approaches. This comparative historical study reveals three conditions that affected reform efforts in the provinces: the need for appropriate teacher education and the development of appropriate supporting materials; the need for an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the reform approach; and the impact of the general social, political, and intellectual environment.

Key words: progressive education, contexts of education, history of education, comparative history.

Voulant mettre en place des approches philosophiques de l'éducation plus novatrices, l'Alberta et l'Ontario ont instauré une réforme pédagogique draconienne durant l'époque progressiste commençant vers 1930 et se terminant en 1955. Vers le milieu des années 1950 toutefois, les deux provinces sont revenues à des approches plus traditionnelles. Cette étude historique comparative met en lumière trois facteurs qui ont eu une incidence sur les efforts de réforme de ces provinces, à savoir le besoin de disposer d'une formation à l'enseignement appropriée et de matériel connexe pertinent, le besoin de cerner les fondements philosophiques des approches retenues pour la réforme et l'impact du contexte social, politique et intellectuel dans son ensemble.

Mots clés : éducation novatrice, contextes pédagogiques, histoire de l'éducation, histoire comparative.

Alberta and Ontario experimented with a number of dramatic organizational, curricular, and pedagogic reforms between c. 1930 and the mid-1950s based on propositions put forward by the Progressive Education movement.<sup>1</sup> Informed by progressive ideology, the Departments of Education in both provinces reorganized the grade-level structure from two to four divisions and abolished most formal promotional examinations. Even more indicative of the influence of progressive philosophy, both jurisdictions introduced a child-centred, subject-integrated, activity-based approach known as the Enterprise method. Equally significant, both Departments fused the content-centred courses History, Geography, and Civics into a new integrated course: Social Studies. Taught across all grade levels, this new subject emphasized development of cooperative, democratic behaviour and inquisitiveness through experiential learning.<sup>2</sup> In short, although variations between the two provinces existed, both jurisdictions put forward a concept in curriculum creation that emerged from the same root desire that characterized the Canadian progressive education movement in general: the development of social skills and the individual was more important than amassing knowledge.

By the mid-1950s the progressive spirit to integrate subjects of the curriculum seems to have foundered in both provinces. In Alberta, for instance, the 1953 Department of Education *Bulletin 2*, issued to guide teachers in developing enterprises, no longer insisted on the integration of health and science in enterprises.<sup>3</sup> The term *enterprise* did remain on the pages of curriculum documents for another generation, but interest in the deeply integrated approach waned during the 1950s and faded away in the early 1960s. The deepest division between the provinces can be found in their treatment of Social Studies. In Alberta, this integrated subject has continued to be part of the core curriculum at all grade levels, while in Ontario for the past fifty years it has been offered only to primary-junior students.

What were the similarities and differences between Alberta's and Ontario's experiences with these innovations? What helped and hindered these curricular and pedagogic reform efforts? And, why did they falter? To address these questions, we conducted a comparative historical study to demonstrate that appropriate teacher education,

appropriate funding, and development of appropriate supporting resources were required to ensure that implementation of the reform remained coherent with its underlying theory; that teachers, resource developers, and curriculum developers needed to thoroughly understand the philosophical underpinnings of the reform to ensure a coherent epistemological, pedagogical, and evaluation approach; and that the general social, political, and intellectual environment had a significant impact on each province's ability to engage in and maintain the reform effort.

#### METHODOLOGY, DEFINITIONS, LIMITATIONS

Canadian educational historians have provided insights into educational policy by examining particular instances of curricular and pedagogic reform efforts as they unfolded within specific regional and provincial jurisdictions (e.g., Hallman, 1992; Thomson, 2000). They have also drawn broader generalizations by referring to Canadian policy as a whole (e.g., Barrow, 1994; Titley, 1990). Rarer in number are comparative studies that examine similarities and differences in programmes and implementation among provinces. Such comparisons are necessary for the development of a more complex understanding of factors that have affected curriculum and pedagogic reform in Canada. Although George Tomkins (1986), for example, argued that a common set of ideas underpinned curriculum development in English Canada, one wonders if curriculum choices are or were ever guided by a shared set of assumptions, especially when considering the socio-political and regional diversity of the nation and the fact that education is under provincial jurisdiction.

Given the current trend toward the creation of common regional curricula, we feel it is important that Canadian educators develop not only an understanding of how unique educational circumstances have affected education in certain localities, but also an understanding of how similarities and differences appear between regions across Canada. By examining studies that compare and contrast provincial experiences in dealing with curricular and pedagogic reform, educators might come closer to comprehending whether Canadians have a shared conception of education and schooling. Based on this thinking, we designed this

study to compare the development and implementation of integrated programmes and pedagogy in Alberta and Ontario between 1930 and 1955.

We selected this period because it was a time of intense curricular and pedagogic experimentation across Canada influenced by the Canadian progressive education movement, which, according to Patterson (1970), "represented a revolt against existing formal and traditional schooling [advocating] ... freedom for the pupil to develop naturally; interest to serve as the motive for all work; the teacher to be a guide, not a task-master" (p. 373; see also Tomkins, 1986, p. 190). Although variations in ideology among Canadian progressive educators occurred, many endeavored to introduce child-centred, hands-on pedagogies and developed new programmes of study to provide schooling to closely match the needs and interests of children. In the first wave of curricular reform, educators added non-traditional subjects: Agriculture, Health, and Civics. Later, progressive curriculum reformers designed programmes to integrate traditional and non-traditional subjects like History, Geography, and Civics into the blended subject called Social Studies. In addition, they designed the project approach or "Enterprise," to integrate Social Studies with Science, Health, and other subjects as necessary for a project. For our analysis, we use the effort that Canadian progressives made to integrate a variety of traditional subjects into a single subject or project as a marker of the flourishing or floundering of progressivism during this era.

We selected Ontario and Alberta because these two provinces were considered educational leaders during various time periods. Ontario was the first Anglo-Canadian province to develop and implement a centralized curriculum and pedagogy for publicly funded grade schools. We chose Alberta because, although other jurisdictions did experiment with progressive ideas and practices, "Alberta led all provinces in its enthusiastic acceptance of progressivism" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 194) and, according to Tomkins (1986) the curriculum revisions undertaken in this province between 1936 and 1940, were "the high water mark in the acceptance of progressive education" (p. 195).

In comparing the two provinces, we reconstructed historical conditions through the examination, interpretation, and corroboration of

both primary and secondary source documents, including contemporary curricula, departmental annual reports, articles, letters, speech transcripts, minutes, as well as other historical studies. These data sources allowed us to recreate past events and circumstances in each province. In turn, we compared events in one province to the other to provide more complex insights into the factors that affected the development and implementation of the reformed programmes.

#### EDUCATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND ATTITUDES LEADING UP TO THE 1930s

##### *Comparing Circumstances*

In the first decade of the twentieth century, many outward aspects of the two provincial educational systems looked remarkably similar. In the programmes of study, this resemblance was not surprising: the original curriculum instituted for Alberta schools, on establishment of the province in 1905, was closely modelled on the Ontario system of “standards” (Alberta *Annual Report*, 1907, pp. 79 - 109; von Heyking, 1996, pp. 33-34). Like its eastern prototype, the purpose of the Alberta programme was to provide a sound basic schooling in the fundamentals and to prepare the small number of students who went on to high school for further academic study. As well, both Ontario and Alberta had developed strongly centralized Departments of Education to deal with the quite scattered and, in places, secluded populations. Lastly, both had a small but vocal intellectual community that argued for progressive educational reform.

Despite these similarities, demographic differences existed between Ontario and Alberta that may have affected the way each jurisdiction perceived education. Ontario, for example, had undergone a lengthy period of land clearing and settling for over a hundred years, and by the turn of the twentieth century had developed several larger urban centres. Those who arrived in Alberta at this time, however, had a sense of being in a newly settled land, with a chance to re-make society, and break free from outworn traditions (Byrne, 1991; Francis & Palmer, 1992; Palmer & Palmer, 1990).

Although the provinces had some educational circumstances in common, this divergence in perspective may explain why a significant

difference in attitude toward curriculum and pedagogic reform developed.

#### *Educational Circumstances in Alberta*

Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, curriculum development was an ongoing project for the Alberta government. Although "some element of flexibility" (von Heyking, 1996, p. 35) had been included in the original programme of 1905, Alberta's educational leaders were soon convinced that it did not meet the needs and interests of Alberta students. Health, Agriculture, and a new stress on Civics were added to the programme in 1910. However, these additions did not represent a profound change in attitude by the Department about what should be taught and learned. Our analysis found very little that reflected methods based on the newer child psychology models of contemporary educational reformers who advocated the education of the whole child through hands-on or activity approaches (Alberta *Annual Report*, 1913, pp. 81 - 158; von Heyking, 1996, pp. 46 & 48). After the Great War, the Alberta programme underwent a profound and sustained transition, evolving from a more traditional curriculum framework to one of the most progressive in Canada

Following consultative discussions with a wide variety of stakeholder groups, the Department introduced a revised elementary programme (Grades 1-8) in 1922 which contained modernized basic subject areas along with new ones; this included Citizenship, Industrial Arts, Hygiene, Physical Education, and Household Economics (Alberta *Course of Studies*, 1922; McNally, 1922, p. 28). Proud of what was perceived to be an innovative, child-centred curriculum, Deputy Minister of Education, G. Fred McNally, reported that "requests for copies [of the program] had been received from every province as well as from Newfoundland and the Yukon" (McNally, 1964, p. 63).

#### *Educational Circumstances in Ontario*

In contrast to the events unfolding in Western Canada, the focus of Ontario's official curriculum policy changed little between the creation of the Ontario Department of Education in 1871 and the mid-1930s. It adhered to a formalized, discipline-based approach towards education

involving a great deal of rote-learning, drill, and memorization (Curtis, 1988, pp. 107-109). Under the direction of the Elementary or Secondary Education Branch, a few subject specialists sporadically updated guidelines that school inspectors then enforced to secure uniform standards throughout the province. In almost all cases, each discipline was closely tied to a specific textbook (Gidney, 1999, pp. 19-21). Even with opposition from teachers' associations, local authorities, and county inspectors promoting changes reflective of the Western reforms, no profound revisions were undertaken until the Conservative government was ousted from power in 1934.<sup>4</sup>

Although conditions between the two provinces seemed similar on the surface, the Ontario government did not experience a period of serious, concerted experimentation with or acceptance of innovative curriculum or pedagogy until the mid-1930s, unlike its counterpart in Alberta, which began making serious changes a decade earlier.

#### EDUCATORS AND REFORM POLITICS

As the century progressed, political and ideological variations between Ontario and Alberta became more pronounced because shifts in provincial government parties and their links to the educational and intellectual communities affected their attitudes toward curricular and pedagogic reform.

##### *Alberta Progressive Educators and the UFA*

Many people who settled in Alberta were seeking a fresh start, believing they could reconstruct a more just society. From this desire grew a number of movements supported by ideologies that advocated deep social and political change. In their political rhetoric, the United Farmers' Association (UFA) reflected these ideals. The UFA began a concerted effort directly after the Great War to improve and advance society through a cooperative, democratic process of social, economic, and political reform (Laycock, 1990, pp. 64-65). Many members of the UFA, which formed the Alberta government between 1921 and 1935, believed that education contributed to the creation of democratic, cooperative citizens and the transformation of society (Patterson, 1968, p. 70).

The Great Depression of the 1930s only intensified the belief that social and economic change were necessary and that curriculum reform was an important avenue for such change. Many UFA members assumed that traditional education perpetuated and promoted an out-dated competitive economic system that had lead to the Depression. They argued that bringing about desired changes to the economic system required sweeping reforms to school curriculum. This faction within the organization received general support through a resolution passed at the 1934 UFA annual convention. It urged the Department of Education to develop a school program that suggested "throughout the entire curriculum, the idea of the advance of society towards a new form of social organization in which the principle of a struggle for private profit shall be displaced by the principles of equity, justice, mutual aid and social well being" (Patterson, 1968, pp. 70-72.)

These beliefs meshed well with American Progressive theories that many Alberta educational leaders advocated (Crawford, 1936; Newland, 1921). During the 1920s and early 1930s, a growing number of these educators had undertaken graduate studies in American universities, many attending Columbia and the University of Chicago, which were both considered hot beds of progressive education. Armed with new ideas about schooling in a democratic society, these reformers suggested that the elementary curriculum should be based on an activity or project approach and argued further that such socialized activity, with the integration of subject matter through large units of work developed around the genuine life interests and experiences of learners, would be ideal for the one-room schools in Alberta (Patterson, 1968, pp. 92, 120-122, & 129-130; von Heyking, 1996, p. 180 & 185-186) .

With the passing of the 1934 UFA resolution and general support of the UFA government, the Department of Education struck a curriculum revision committee composed of one school inspector, William E. Hay, and two normal school instructors, Donalda Dickie and Olive M. Fisher. The group met "for the purposes of preparing an [elementary] activity curriculum to be introduced on a trial basis in the fall term of 1935" (Patterson, 1968, pp. 121-122).<sup>5</sup>



*Ontario: Changing Political Parties and Curriculum Reform*

Arguing against Ontario's rather inflexible and centralized educational system, several teachers' groups in Ontario pressured the Department for educational reforms to better serve society. Unlike the more radical UFA in Alberta, who openly consulted with a variety of voices within the educational establishment, the Ontario Conservative government tended to refrain from action unless they were directly and vocally petitioned from other levels of the hierarchy. Even then, historian W. G. Fleming (1972, pp. 2-3) maintained that the upper hierarchy of the Ontario education system had become experts in actively turning a deaf ear to dissenting voices (see also Manzer, 1994; Mosely, 1968).

The Ontario Education Association had long advocated the importance of student-centred pedagogy. Although people from Ontario spoke on the subject rather frequently, the most vehement and memorable support for such approaches appears to have traveled to Ontario through circuit tours by progressive speakers and literature brought to the annual conventions.<sup>6</sup> Despite this ferment, comments in newspapers and printed political debates throughout the 1920s and 1930s indicated that these ideas were already impacting educational reform in Alberta. These sources made scathing comparisons between the cutting-edge of educational thought in the Western provinces and the mired conservatism of Ontario's educational system (Patterson, 1970, pp. 377- 378).<sup>7</sup> Demonstrating the difference in attitude, one of the members of the UFA Alberta government, C. L. Gibbs (1928), expressed the sentiments of many Westerners, expressing the hope

that when the [Alberta] Department mountain had finished its labours there would not issue forth some little mouse, grey with Ontario dust and heavy with Ontario prejudice, but that we would have an Act that would really meet our particular needs and be in harmony with progressive ideals now becoming current in the educational world. (p. 3)

By the 1930s, demand in Ontario for progressive reforms became increasingly vehement. The New Education Fellowship, a small but influential organization, pressured the Ontario Education Association for progressive reform. Eventually, an amalgamation of various teachers'

federations, parent groups, trustees' associations, and members of the Ontario Education Association itself formed the broad-based Ontario Educational Research Committee. Describing it as "a membership reading like a *Who's Who* of Ontario education at mid-decade," Stamp (1982) concluded that this committee's main purpose was "to rip apart current curriculum and instructional practices" (p. 166).

But, only when a new Liberal government ascended to power in 1934 under Mitchell Hepburn did the Department become more receptive to the calls for educational reform. Following remarkably close on the heels of the sweeping changes being broadcast from Alberta, the new Ontario Minister of Education, Leo J. Simpson, announced in 1936 that a committee would be appointed to create a new Programme of Studies for the elementary system. Whether influenced by his senior departmental officials, the continued pressure by the Ontario educational elite, or the example put forth from Alberta, Simpson insisted that the new curriculum would be based on more progressive methods.<sup>8</sup> To facilitate this process, two men who were sympathetic to the progressive movement were appointed as co-chairs of the programme committee: Thornton Mustard of the Toronto Normal School, and Stanley A. Watson, principal of Toronto's Keele Street Public School. When they issued their final report, the new ideas in the curriculum reflected Alberta's guidelines. In fact, the Alberta Supervisor of Schools, H. C. Newland (in Stamp, 1982) noted with glee, "This is the first time on record that the good old province of Ontario saw fit to import an educational procedure from the West" (p. 167).

Although the American progressive movement appeared to heavily influence Alberta's educational reform, committee members for the Ontario curriculum acknowledged Great Britain as the primary contributor to their revisions (Ontario *Programme of Studies*, 1937, pp. 5-6). This difference in influences (or at least the willingness to acknowledge the origins of influence) highlights the divergence in the political and ideological circumstances of the two provinces. Although similar ideas of educational reform influenced both provinces, Ontario, deeply steeped in traditional philosophic idealism, looked more toward Great Britain than the United States for intellectual leadership, and did not appear as deeply committed to social and political change. Alberta,

in contrast, experimented with more radical types of political parties and with ideas from American pragmatist philosophical approaches to education for a democratic society. This difference in general philosophical influence may have helped Alberta's progressive curriculum reformers and hindered progressive educators in Ontario.

#### COMPARING THE REFORMED CURRICULA

When Alberta and Ontario unveiled their new elementary curriculum programmes, both documents had all the earmarks of a truly progressive spirit: integrated subject areas, the promotion of child-centred, hands-on/discovery pedagogic approaches, and the abolishment of formal promotion examinations at the elementary level (Newland, 1937, p. 15; Ontario, *Annual Report*, 1938). However, clear differences existed between them in the degree of integration expected and the amount of direction in the documents to guide implementation of the programmes.

##### *Alberta Curriculum*

The Alberta elementary curriculum (1936) for grades 1 through 6 was ready for trial implementation in September 1935. This curriculum, which closely adhered to the project approach devised by the American progressive scholar W. H. Kilpatrick (1918), was the first official curriculum in Canada to whole-heartedly advocate such a teaching method. Activities were to be directed toward the solving of selected problems in socialized projects labelled enterprises. Within an enterprise, this curriculum broke down traditional subject matter classifications, correlated, and consolidated many different learning units through socialized learning activities and experiences. School learning "embrace[d] not merely the knowledge and skills of the traditional school 'subjects', but also many appreciations, attitudes, ideals and incidental habits and abilities" (p. 4). The program also stipulated child-centred pedagogy — that is, learning by doing, with the "things to do... ...resid[ing] in the experience of the child" (p. 4).

To ease the transition to the new approach, the finalized elementary program (1936) did not make the enterprise compulsory; it designated instructional materials in a dual manner: subjects (such as reading, arithmetic, science, art, and music), and enterprises (p. 5). Social Studies,

introduced as a new integrated subject, represented "a fusion of Geography, History and Civics" (Newland, 1936, p. 16). Suggested enterprises were listed alongside subjects in the program (1936), and teachers could "elect as much or as little of the enterprise work as they desire," although teachers were encouraged to attempt at least one or two enterprises per year, to a maximum of six (p. 5).

In 1940, after the new elementary program had been in place for several years allowing teachers to become familiar with its goals and approaches (Newland, 1940, p. 14), the Department issued a revised edition (1940) that involved "a further step ... towards complete integration of the Program, with the result that the integrated part of the Program now includes History, Geography, Elementary Science, Health and Physical Education" (p. 27).

*Ontario: The Little Grey and Blue Books*

Contained in the small, grey-covered booklet, the revised curriculum in Ontario entitled the *Programme of Studies for Grades I to VI of the Public and Separate Schools* (1937) soon became known as the "Little Grey Book." Similar to the Alberta program, this curriculum advocated the development of socially desirable qualities and abilities, rather than amassing knowledge. The Ontario document stated that "any education worthy of that name must be planned in accordance with the best available evidence on the nature of the child's development" (p. 5). It determined the function of the school to provide a "stimulating environment" which directed pupils' natural tendencies "into useful and desirable attitudes" (p. 5). The document concluded: "[I]n short, the school must follow the method of nature, stimulating the child, through his own interests, into activities and guiding him into experiences useful for the satisfaction and development of his needs" (p. 6).

Although Ontario reformers did not introduce the enterprise method in full-blown description at all grade levels, they took what they considered to be revolutionary action to change the curriculum's traditional fifteen-subject arrangement. Reinforcing the importance of basic reading and inquiry skills, the authors fused the old disciplines into seven broad areas: Health, English, Social Studies, Natural Science, Arithmetic, Music, and Art. This new programme elevated the

conventionally fringe subjects of music, art, and physical education from the status of optional subjects or extracurricular activities to the importance of the traditional subjects.

In addition, the curriculum committee introduced the integrated Social Studies (Ontario, *Programme of Studies*, 1941), using words and set-up almost identical to the Alberta Social Studies model: a mixture of geography, history, and civics, which was to represent 20 per cent of the time spent in school. Rather than the memorization of facts in a chronological fashion grade after grade, children developed desirable social attitudes and inquiring, well-informed minds, interested in understanding their society. They worked their way outward through concentric circles of understanding. Beginning with a study of home and school, students then moved on to study the town, province, then country, followed by other countries, and ultimately to the comparison of ancient and modern social life (p. 60). Although this description seems more structured than that of the Alberta curriculum, teachers were instructed not to worry if students accumulated knowledge in an unsystematic way.

Overall, the programme removed restrictions on teachers and pupils by providing latitude for selective emphases and variation in methods, at a teacher's discretion. Outside a common core of knowledge, each student was encouraged to follow his or her "individual talent."<sup>9</sup> Obviously, this meant that a large part of the program was to be delivered using alternatives to the traditional formal lesson. However, when the "Grey Book" came out in Ontario in 1937, it gave little instruction on how to execute the integrated programme. Beyond general discussions of the importance of a unified curriculum, it provided no details about the workings of the project method, nor stipulated specific enterprise ideas.

#### IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS: ISSUES FOR TEACHERS

Problems with the new programmes arose almost immediately in both provinces, particularly with the implementation of the new, activity-based pedagogy. The teachers of the new elementary curricula had great difficulty translating the suggested programmes into meaningful learning experiences.

Although the Alberta Department of Education made a significant effort to train teachers in the new approach through summer and normal school sessions, the curriculum developers complained that such efforts focused on pedagogical techniques rather than on the philosophy and theory of the approach. Consequently, in implementing the program, teachers often mistook "the means for the end and ... allowed the pupils' activity to degenerate into purely mechanical exercises" (*Alberta Annual Report*, 1936, p. 52). In addition, many teachers believed that the program objectives were too vague. The document focussed mainly on attitudes, appreciations, and habits, leaving teachers with no clear idea of expected content knowledge outcomes. The Department's annual reports included notes by school inspectors that, because teachers lacked an understanding of the theory of the activity approach, they tended "to define activity in terms of bodily movements" (*Alberta Annual Report*, 1938, p. 61). The school inspectors further concluded that enterprises often became "mere pleasant time-filling activity" and even the skill subjects like arithmetic suffered with "far more movement, visiting and consultation than is necessary in a period devoted to mental activity" (*Alberta Annual Report*, 1941, p. 69).

Alberta teachers also faced two new problems with the progressive program. With the abolishment of all but two formal promotional examinations, teachers were required to devise internal evaluation tools to place "pupils where they can work to best advantage" (Newland, 1937, p. 15). With program goals emphasizing habits, appreciations, and the creation of responsible citizens, teachers were "simply at a loss" (Newland, 1937, p. 15) about how to measure student achievement. And, with the new emphasis on student freedom and activity, discipline issues increased. The pages of the Alberta Teachers' Association magazine provide evidence of escalating anxiety, where hints for keeping discipline began to appear on a regular basis. In addition, beginning in 1945, the Chief Superintendent of Schools began to devote a section in the Department's annual report to the observations of superintendents about discipline and control (*Alberta, Annual Reports*, 1945, p. 28; 1946, p. 31; & 1947, p.36; von Heyking, 1996, p. 262).

In Ontario, the creators of the 1937 programme ran into similar roadblocks. Because the Department had responded to pressures from

various interest groups, its officials had expected that the document would be disseminated to a largely young, well-educated generation of teachers who knew the scholarship surrounding its progressive spirit, and could apply the various approaches needed to reach its goals (Gidney, 1999, p. 32; Ontario *Annual Report*, 1937, p. 2). Instead, it was faced with numerous teachers who seemed to ignore many aspects of the reformed programme, and who complained that the curriculum documents did not include details about the workings of the project method or stipulate specific enterprise ideas. In explaining this apathetic reaction, Patterson (1990) referred to comments made by V. K. Greer, chief inspector of schools in Ontario: "Even though young teachers had received training at normal school which was intended for them for the new curriculum, many of them ... lacked the courage to follow the new methods" (p. 106).

The root of the problem was not necessarily a lack of courage, however. As in Alberta, the problem was related to the misunderstanding of or hostility toward the philosophy of the new method. Although progressive ideas in the form of Dewey's pragmatic philosophy had been part of the theoretical discourse of normal schools in Ontario since 1907,<sup>10</sup> such ideas were not adopted in practice. Although teachers had learned about pragmatic philosophy, the instruction in normal schools had left most teachers unable to internalize the philosophical assumptions of curriculum integration and the enterprise approach. Phillips (1957) concluded that these teachers adhered only to the external forms of the progressive approach, thereby losing the significance of such experiences.

Many teachers thought of enterprises as the material objects produced in periods allotted to work with paper, paste, wood, and bits of metal. When these teachers ceased having their pupils engage in such nearly useless construction, or were told to do so, it appears that enterprise work fell off. (p. 465)

Numerous archival records throughout the late 1930s displayed teachers' apparent ignorance of progressive approaches or refusal to teach using any approach but traditional methods. In letters sent to the Department, some teachers asked for guidance in undertaking projects; others complained about the noise levels and lack of discipline associated with the activities. One rural teacher starkly submitted her

resignation, stating that having taught in the system for forty years she was not going to change now.<sup>11</sup> Some members of the various grass-roots groups that had originally petitioned for the change also began to turn rather cold towards the new document, arguing that the method was lessening the emphasis on the three Rs, and weakening discipline and authority (Stamp, 1982). The immediate response of practitioners to the new Ontario program was unfavourable, if not hostile.

#### IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS: REPONSES FROM REFORMERS AND DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

Between the introduction of the new curricula and their eventual demise, progressive reformers in each province endeavoured to respond helpfully to the implementation problems. However, clear differences occurred in the depth and intensity of the help offered by each province.

##### *The Alberta Response*

Believing that appropriately trained educator were the key to proper implementation, Alberta reformers continued their effort to educate teachers in the goals and methods of the activity approach. Normal schools implemented a "new and dynamic type of instruction" to exemplify the new technique, and teachers were encouraged to attend summer school sessions and special programs at teachers' conventions to learn about the new method (*Alberta Annual Report*, 1940, p. 15). In addition, the Alberta Teachers' Association established professional libraries in school divisions across the province and sponsored numerous local teacher study groups to examine progressive practice.

Although these efforts certainly indicate a strong commitment to implementing the new program and pedagogy, von Heyking (1996) points out that "varying degrees of support for the innovations" (p. 192) occurred among those involved in these pre- and in-service teacher education efforts. For example, a survey of staff at the Edmonton Normal School indicated that opinion among the faculty ranged from those who were completely committed to the deep integration of subject matter and emphasis on development of social attitudes, to those who were "subject-minded" and regarded "the enterprise as merely another, though important, addition to the battery of methods and techniques



employed by the progressive teacher" (Doucette, nd, np.) Although teachers may have received a reasonably sound education in the pedagogical techniques, they most likely received mixed and perhaps confusing messages about progressive philosophy and theory.

The education programs for pre- and in-service teachers apparently did not deal effectively with teachers' tribulations in devising internal evaluation tools to measure student achievement. In 1943, the Department of Education, reacting to teachers' continued difficulties with assessment, issued a Supplement to the elementary program of studies (1943) that "set out the *minimum pupil attainments* [sic] that parents, teachers and superintendents should expect to find in the average school" (p. 13). The Department hoped that these attainment targets would establish "a basis for comparing the work of schools in different parts of the Province" (p. 13). In 1946 and 1947, the Department, offering further assistance to teachers in assessing student achievement, introduced a province-wide testing program that determined the level of essential skills among grade-6 students. The Department hoped that this examination would maintain a "greater uniformity of standards throughout the province" (Alberta *Annual Report*, 1946, p. 65; 1947, p. 57). Because this assessment programme was contrary to the philosophy of the progressive programme and pedagogy, this standardized test of skills was incompatible with the theoretical approach that advocated for locally developed, context-specific evaluation.

In contrast, teacher education had enhanced teachers' understanding that progressive practice used a wide variety of resource materials, reference books, and locally developed units. However, despite the efforts of teachers and education leaders to convince school boards to purchase necessary materials and equipment, school inspector reports into the 1940s indicated that the lack of appropriate resources was problematic (Alberta *Annual Report*, 1942, p. 29; von Heyking, 1996, pp. 263-264). Hence, despite the fact that progressive theory advocated that teachers develop their own units and projects in relation to the particular needs and interests of their students, some members of Alberta's Department of Education reasoned that it should assist teachers to develop classroom programmes by creating more child-centred, user-friendly textbooks to match programme goals (von Heyking, 1996, pp.

254-256). Further, believing that “the lack of teacher reference materials geared particularly to our curricular outlines may have contributed in part to certain malpractices that have occurred within our Enterprise education” (*Alberta Annual Report*, 1947, p. 56), some members of the Department (1947) also recommended that the newly established Teachers' Service Bureau undertake the construction and distribution of “experimental resource units designed to be of direct assistance in handling the topics prescribed or suggested for general use at various grade levels” (p. 56). By 1948, the Bureau had begun the distribution of such resources at no charge, a practice that continued throughout the 1950s.

Overall, despite the relatively intense professional development efforts, Alberta teachers remained generally ill prepared to implement progressive methods. In addition, as various curriculum committees tinkered with the course of studies and as the Department continued to centrally distribute resource materials and evaluation tools, the programs and practices actually in use in Alberta schools became an awkward blend of traditional and progressive approaches.

#### *The Ontario Response*

By 1941, the Ontario Department of Education realized that teachers were either not employing the new programme, or were doing so in a haphazard or formulaic fashion.<sup>12</sup> According to R. M. Stamp (1982), educational leaders in the province may have employed ineffective implementation strategies. For example, little difference appeared at the Normal School level between the list of departmental summer courses before and after the introduction of the curriculum reforms. In fact, courses and examination papers did not particularly stress progressive techniques. Many public school inspectors echoed this lack of emphasis, repeatedly reminding teachers to drill, review, and test student knowledge in the core subjects. Although the Department advised inspectors to familiarize teachers with the new methodology, it gave few details concerning the fine points of the enterprise approach beyond what was found in the “Little Grey Book.” As related by Stamp (1982), at least one school inspector’s ultimate goal of the new education was

merely "to interest the child in his work, so that he wants to do what we want him to do" (p. 169).

Nevertheless, the Ontario Department of Education took some action toward helping teachers implement the new curriculum. The chairs of the curriculum committee, Mustard and Watson, were sent on whistle-stop speaking engagements concerning the innovations. These engagements did not involve actual training sessions and no follow-up information was supplied, leaving teachers with the impression that the new method was nothing more than a fad supported by slogans (Stamp, 1982, p. 171).

To ameliorate implementation problems, the Department re-struck the programme committee in 1941 with the goal of updating the curriculum to give teachers concrete guidance in realizing the goals of progressive education. To this end, a new section was added to the document entitled "The Enterprise Method," embodying a truncated version of the techniques put forward in *The Enterprise in Theory and Practice* by Alberta progressive reformer, Donalda Dickie (1940). This section also advised teachers to organize informal meetings to discuss the enterprise approach.

The Ontario curriculum committee's only other addition to the programme was a response to media demands for assurance that the Department of Education was cognizant that schooling should reflect the effort to win the war and maintain the Canadian way of life. This addition, extolling the benefits of a democratic society, based on Christian ideals and its bulwark, the British Commonwealth, was repeatedly mentioned in several places: the preamble, the Enterprise, and the Social Studies sections. The Ontario *Programme of Studies* (1941) proclaimed that "national character" could be strengthened only through training students in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and concluded that democracy demands "the finest service of which [the child] is capable, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the common welfare" (pp. 5, 16-24, & 71-86).

Beyond the whistle-stop tour and curriculum additions, the Ontario Department of Education did not engage in further efforts to enhance implementation of the enterprise approach, although though the Depression had left many schools, especially in rural areas, woefully

short of materials needed as teachers' aids, for professional development, or even books for the libraries (Patterson, 1990, p. 110). Although letters from teachers continued to arrive at the Department on a frequent basis, pleading for more concrete aid to understand the progressive techniques, the Department, perhaps distracted by the war effort, offered the same number of training sessions on the Enterprise method during the early 1940s as it had in the late 1930s. According to Fleming (1971, pp. 9-11), enterprises were never evaluated or used for promotional purposes and only sparse records show that Ontario teachers actually used the approach at this time.

Although both provinces endeavoured to respond helpfully to implementation problems, Alberta clearly made a more profound effort, going beyond making changes to the curriculum document. Nevertheless, Alberta's approach did not prove to be any more successful in sustaining the progressive programme in the long run, as compared to Ontario's approach.

#### LONG-TERM REACTIONS TO THE PROGRESSIVE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC REFORM

Eventually, both Alberta and Ontario returned to a subject/discipline-based curriculum. Both provinces reacted, in part, to similar negative responses to the progressive programme that arose from the broader stakeholder community. However, particular local circumstances also affected the reaction of each Department of Education.

##### *Alberta Reactions*

Between 1945 and 1955, an increasing wave of scholarship turned against the progressive ideas embedded in the revised curriculum. Critics, like university professors H. Neatby (1953) and W. G. Hardy (1954), argued that the approach concentrated too much attention on the development of attitudes and behaviours and pleasurable activities and too little on the development of essential basic skills and intellectual rigour. These critics also argued that progressive education was amoral, irreligious, and un-Canadian because it arose out of a materialistic and relativistic American social orientation. Alberta businessmen, politicians, and the general public took up many of these criticisms.<sup>13</sup> Expressing

dissatisfaction with the programs and the approach, they were convinced that progressive education had led to falling academic standards. Caught up in the post-war economic boom, parents and the general public were convinced that schooling should better enable students to participate in the economic opportunities at hand in Alberta; they argued that education should produce high quality technicians and professional people who were in high demand in Alberta's vigorous economy (von Heyking, 1996).

Although Alberta did not experience a change in government during this time, there had been a change in personnel at the upper echelons of the Department of Education. H. C. Newland, a vehement anti-traditionalist advocate of the integrated progressive approach, had resigned as Deputy Minister, replaced by W. H. Swift, who took a more moderate position. Although Swift (1954) challenged Neatby's more strident claims about the ineffectiveness of progressive education, he believed "That in some degree theory and enthusiasm have outrun practice and practicability in instituting changes" (np). Under Swift's leadership, the elementary curriculum committee once again revised the programme of studies in 1955 to re-clarify program goals. Except for Social Studies, which has been retained as a compulsory subject in Alberta to the present, this committee dis-integrated the course of studies to re-emphasize content while attempting to retain child-centred pedagogy.

#### *Ontario Reactions*

In 1943, shortly after the dissemination of the new programme of studies that included The Enterprise Method, the Ontario Liberals fell from power, replaced by a Conservative government under Col. George Drew. Rather than promoting a progressive agenda, the Tories focused on the promotion of an education system that included the inculcation of patriotism, Christian principles, self-discipline, the nuclear family, and ethical values for freedom and democracy, re-emphasizing basic reading and mathematical skills (Drew, 1943-1944). The Department made no changes to the programme documents themselves, however, believing that another round of curriculum reform would have inserted unnecessary chaos during a time of great disruption for an

administration caught within the strains of an escalating and costly war effort.

The true end of the first progressive era in Ontario can be linked to the cabinet shuffle of 1951, which resulted in a newly appointed Minister of Education. In this move, the progressive Dana Porter was replaced with a longtime Department and University of Toronto bureaucrat, William J. Dunlop. The complete antithesis of his predecessor, Dunlop put forward a paternalistic view of education. He maintained that it was the sworn responsibility of Ontario teachers to inculcate a uniform body of knowledge, promulgated by a centralized Department, based on the will of the populace and established thought (Foley, 1966). Dunlop repeatedly voiced his antipathy towards the 1941 programme of study, stating that he would not rest until "the last shreds of this so-called progressive education are gone" because it merely encouraged "self-expression and day-dreaming ... to the exclusion of down-to-earth fundamentals" (Dunlop, 1953, p. 63).

He found ample support for his continued battle against progressivism from Neatby's (1953) hugely successful book *So Little for the Mind*. Following her recommendations, Dunlop's plans included the subdividing of Social Studies into History and Geography and the return of Latin to the curriculum. Ontario's mid-century experiment with the integration of disciplines came to a grinding halt.<sup>14</sup> Until the neo-progressive movement of the late 1960s, the Social Studies component of the elementary programme up to grade 6 was the only element of the progressive curriculum to survive Dunlop's reactionary reforms.

#### CHALLENGES TO CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC REFORM

The comparison of the curriculum reform paths taken by Alberta and Ontario reveals conditions that affected the development and implementation of curricula and pedagogy based on propositions put forward by the Canadian progressive education movement. In the Ontario example, the lack of appropriate education for both preservice and in-service teachers in the new approaches hindered efforts to implement them. At the same time, the Alberta example demonstrates that, although efforts may be exerted to educate teachers, training in pedagogical techniques was practically useless because it was not

accompanied by an effort to help teachers internalize the underlying theory and philosophy. The Alberta example also demonstrates that despite a commitment to teacher education, differences in degree of support for reform among teacher educators gave teachers mixed messages about theory and philosophy.

Our examination of the circumstances in both Ontario and Alberta indicates that teachers were not provided with either the education or the financial resources to develop appropriate teaching materials. As a result, teachers relied on materials that did not necessarily match the goals or pedagogy of the programme, or the needs of their particular students and projects. Without appropriate education, teachers had difficulty devising strategies to use available materials in ways that were authentic to the new approach.

Added to this issue, Alberta and Ontario progressive reformers did not carefully consider the implications for assessment and evaluation that came with new curricula and pedagogical approaches. This failing implies that development and implementation efforts are hindered if a coherent approach to all aspects of an educational endeavour is not formulated, that is, a coherent epistemology, pedagogy, and evaluation. Without this coherence, the resulting programmes in both Alberta and Ontario almost necessarily became a strange patchwork of the traditional and progressive.

This historical study suggests that differences in social and political circumstances and ideology both helped and hindered curricular and pedagogic reform. The Ontario example indicates that a changing political situation, with corresponding changes in ideology, had a dramatic effect on reform efforts: hindering, then helping, then hindering again, depending on the party in power and the minister in charge. The Alberta example demonstrates that the general attitude toward reform and the apparent ideological consensus among education reformers and political reformers proved helpful in the initial development and implementation. However, this example also demonstrates such a consensus, whether apparent or real, was difficult to sustain and that when it disintegrated, the curricular reform effort disintegrated along with it.

Taken together, this comparison demonstrates the connections, contrarities, and convolutions of curricular and pedagogic reform that unfolded in the two provinces between c. 1930 and 1955. If educators were to use these past experiences to inform their current efforts to reform curriculum and pedagogy, they might attend to the conditions that affected these earlier reform efforts to ensure that implementation of the reform remained coherent with its underlying theory, including appropriate teacher education, appropriate funding, and appropriate supporting material. As well, such reformers need to ensure that the philosophical underpinnings of the reform approach are thoroughly understood by teachers, resource developers, and curriculum revisers to ensure a coherent epistemological, pedagogical, and evaluation approach. Moreover, the general social, political, and intellectual environments have a significant impact on how education reformers engage in and sustain the reform effort.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to Tomkins (1986) Progressive Education is a “loosely applied label, a complex reality that had both liberal and conservative dimensions” (p. 189). He describes certain sub-divisions of the movement based on their dominant characteristics: (a) the “administrative progressives” and “educational scientists” who sought to centralize education for social control and social efficiency and (b) the “pedagogical progressives” – the group we have chosen to examine in our analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Note the description of Social Studies in the Alberta Elementary *Program of Studies* (1936): “[Social Studies is a programme] ...where the child is granted a considerable degree of freedom to make decisions and to carry out his [her] own designs .... The Social Studies afford experiences in which the teacher progressively aids the pupil to develop an understanding of his relationships to others, and to adjust himself to living in a world of other youths and adults, things, institutions, ideas and aspirations.” (pp.109-110)

<sup>3</sup> Statements in the Alberta Ministry's *Bulletin 2* (1949, p. 16) show that health and science continued to be integrated into the enterprise program, while statements made in *Bulletin 2* (1953, pp. 35-6) indicate that there was no need to integrate these subjects.



<sup>4</sup> Although educational promoters outside of the inner circle of the Department (for example, the New Education Fellowship and the Ontario Education Association) strongly advanced certain reforms in the school system and local authorities and personalities like Toronto Superintendent James L. Hughes or Hamilton homemaker Adelaide Hoodless even managed to have certain innovations added to the curriculum through their sheer strength of will (Patterson 1974), Stamp (1982) points out that these new courses were merely piecemeal additions to the curriculum (pp. 164-5) doing little to change the traditional, subject-centred, teacher-centred philosophy in the Ontario program.

<sup>5</sup> Although this new curriculum was under development, an election occurred and the Social Credit came to power. This change did not affect the curricular reform in Alberta, and the new government, with William Aberhart as both premier and Minister of Education, continued to support progressive curricular reform. In fact, the curriculum revision of 1940 aimed at an even deeper integration of subjects.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1884, for example, the Ontario Teachers' Association brought in the champion of child-centred education, Colonel Francis W. Parker, to speak at their annual convention (Guillet, 1960, pp. 109-110). For Parker's ongoing connection with Canada, see Campbell (1975).

<sup>7</sup> Although the United Farmers of Ontario did win one term in office, they seemed more devoted to extending and improving educational facilities in rural districts than to curriculum reform (Stamp, 1982, pp. 108-109).

<sup>8</sup> Both Simpson and his deputy Minister/Chief Director, Duncan McArthur, were well versed in the American, British, and Canadian innovations brought forth by the philosophy of progressivism. For their connection to the educational elite in Ontario, see Wood (1985).

<sup>9</sup> A whole section was devoted to this aspect of education in both the *Programme of Studies for Grades 1 to 6* (1941) and the *Programme of Studies for Grades 7 and 8* (1942).

<sup>10</sup> Of the four books listed in the first calendar of the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto, established in 1907, two were written by John Dewey. Even the Ontario Teachers' *Manual on History of Education*, published in 1915, makes mention of Dewey's influence (Phillips, 1957, p. 426).

<sup>11</sup> Various authors, "Correspondence to the Superintendent of Elementary Education," RG-2, P-3, Box 244, File 4-815/816, Archives of Ontario.

<sup>12</sup> C. C. Goldring, superintendent of Schools for Toronto in 1937-8, contradicts this statement, claiming that at least 85 per cent of public school teachers encouraged their classes to undertake enterprises. However, this was in

the most urban of school districts with access to more materials (Tomkins, 1986, p. 198). Further, even Goldring warned that he felt the enterprise was being used in an excessively formalized way, as product not process.

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see editorial (1946) The Three R's, *Lethbridge Herald*, reprinted in *The Alberta School Trustee*, 16/9, p. 28; letter to the editor (November 1947) *Calgary Herald*, p. 20; author unknown. (1950) Not Enough Facts Taught in School. *Alberta Home and School News*, 5/9, p. 5; J. J. Brown (1951), Mr. Brown Looks at Education, *Canadian Business*, 24/11, p.49 cited in von Heyking, 1996, pp. 337-339.

<sup>14</sup> By 1942, criticisms of progressivism were becoming more pointed during the annual conventions of the Ontario Education Association. See 1943 speeches by Darcy Davidson of Ryerson Public School, Toronto; Dr. J. F. McDonald, the Inspector of Separate Schools for Ottawa; Dr. S. F. Maine of the University of Western Ontario; and the 1952 convention dedicated to rethinking the progressive model, in Guillet (1960).

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